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JASPAR JOSEPH-LESTER AND NORMAN M. KLEIN

Venice, Venice

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Abstract

Venice Beach, Los Angeles and Little Venice, London provide the basis for a series of reflections that explore the way the city is hardwired into a collective imaginary. These very different reproductions of Venice share the underlying principles that correspond to the economic and political aspiration of the modern city: carnivality and staging; the hypnogogic dream space and travel; guild capitalism and spectatorship. The enduring references to Venice that exist at the heart of Los Angeles and London speak of a desire for the sovereign city state and reflect a wider move to a new feudalism that increasingly characterizes the western metropolis.



Figure 1: Venice, Los Angeles, 2007.

Café, Grange Fitzrovia Hotel, London.
14 October 2016

Norman M. Klein: Abbot Kinney, I really don't know what his obsession with Venice was. He was a real estate baron, a bohemian character, an influence on the woman who wrote the most popular novel about Los Angeles, back in the 1880s. Then he is stuck with marshland essentially along a beach and imagines that it is the ultimate mardis gras for real estate. His Venice, in full detail, flops as real estate, in 1905, but succeeds as an amusement area. Strange that Venice was already the ultimate amusement fantasy city.

Jaspar Joseph-Lester: There is this kind of morphing of Venice that happens through the copy, one copy after another – Venice Beach (LA) is clearly a massive project but Little Venice (London) is only really a name. When we go over to West London, I think that we will find that there is little of Venice to be seen.

Our task is to understand what these interpretations of Venice mean in relation to the broader context of London and Los Angeles. Why is there a constant return to an image of Venice and what place does it have within culture today?

NMK: Isn't it all about Keats. Didn't Keats die in Venice? He certainly writes about Venice.

JJL: Don't forget Byron and Ruskin.

NMK: It can't just be that there is a bit of water there. It would be interesting to know, especially as we have these sovereign nation states yet to emerge, if Venice invented the nation state?

JJL: It certainly acted as a centre for global trade. Venice is key to the development of global commerce but also the idea of the sovereign city state.

I was thinking that this dialogue or wormhole between Venice Beach and Little Venice could be played out using visual material. We should consider which visual tropes endure and how they are taken up and returned to again and again.

NMK: Does the British Museum have something on Venice?

JJL: Yes and the Aby Warburg Institute. There are some very odd photographs of Venice in the archive.

NMK: But there are all sorts of granular Venices. The question is what parameters do we set ourselves in terms of doing this thing? What about this, what do we hope to discover, what are the questions we wish we could answer even if we don't know how to. We may need to take some license. What do we really want to know beyond what we knew the answers to? What do we wish to discover even if we don't know how to go about discovering it? If there was a lost document in some withered envelope in the drawer of Victorian desk, and it contained some 60 pages of something, what would we hope it was?

JJL: We left it last time, when we walked around Venice Beach in 2007, by thinking of Venice as a barometer of some sort, a tool that might offer some insight into the life of the city. It presented us with a way to look at the reproduction in order to see what it tells us about the current status of the city. If we look closely at Venice Beach and Little Venice, they might tell us something about the wider, physical, economic and social structures that surround them: just as the marks on the surface are often an indication of a deeper causal origin, these Venices might provide some way of understanding something more profound than we might at first imagine. They might help us to coax out the knowledge we didn't even know that we were searching for.

NMK: What is curious about Venice is that it is the only city that is commemorated for its infrastructure. Nobody looks at Paris and says: 'Oh boy, I love the toilets and water systems in Paris' though the pissoirs on nineteenth century Parisian streets were a sensory event often mentioned

in guidebooks. And while Paris was also famous for its sewers, where monsters hide in famous novels, this is not why Paris is called 'the capital of the nineteenth century' by Walter Benjamin. Yet somehow, by contrast, Venice is indeed renowned because of its water system and infrastructure; that's why it survived the Adriatic.

JJL: Venice is also famous as a place for getting lost; it is a sort of labyrinth. The canal system seems to direct you around in circles, there is a sense of moving in on yourself, of going back on yourself. One time, returning from some Biennale event about two in the morning, I came across two American Army marines trying to find their way back to their ship. They had been walking for hours and were getting desperate. All I could do was give them a cigarette. I was also struggling to find my way home, but unlike the marines I was able to recognize the odd Piazza or canal bridge.

NMK: Venice can't get any bigger. It is the only city that has never grown an inch larger. It is the only city on earth that has remained the same size. There are about 40,000–50,000 people living there now. It was just the same in the fifteenth century.

JJL: Also, the shifting status of Venice Beach (LA) is quite interesting. You could say that it has been through a kind of entropy – buildings being left to crumble, derelict buildings being used as markets and places where people go to score drugs. Some of Kinney's buildings were knocked down; many were becoming dangerous and were increasingly symbolic of social and economic decline in that area of the city.

NMK: People would definitely want them back now!

JJL: The canals started to smell.

NMK: They forgot that canals actually have to spill into something.

JJL: In the 1930s, the canals that were more like Venice Canals, the curvy more circular canals – built as a scaled down imitation of the Grand Canal – these more interesting experiments were all filled in. They had been left to stagnate. The canals were full of dead cats and rubbish, and the city needed more roads so they filled in the best of the canals and tarmacked them over to make more roads. I once made a film shot from the backseat of a Mustang – the imitation or I should say redesign of the Mustang associated with Steve McQueen in *Bullitt* (1968). I positioned the camera in the back of the car, buckled up the tripod and drove over the remaining Venice bridges as fast as the car would go. I nearly drove into some guy's pooch. It would have been impossible to get permission to have done that filming.

NMK: The city of LA took charge of Venice, California in 1925. The Venice LA story then becomes fairly straightforward in its punishment. Strangely, LA did not yet believe in that much street entertainment as a moral form of capitalism. Venice slipped precipitously. By 1968, there is a film with



Figure 2: *Jaspar Joseph-Lester, Mustang, 2007.*

Peter Sellers: *I Love you, Alice B. Toklas.* It's all shot in Venice LA looking like the slums in Rio. The film is about a businessman who becomes a hippie, and he lives in a kind of favela in Venice.

I had a student once who said that his grandfather was a garbage collector working in Venice Beach for 30 years, including 1968. There were things that he would find, and things that he would keep.

JJL: Wow, what kind of stuff?

NMK: That's exactly what I said. The garage was completely full of Venice junk going back 40 years, including the Beats. There was some stuff from the Doors. Old music scores, scraps of paper, things like that. The student asked me, 'should I throw out my granddad's old stuff?' I would say 'no, it is a rare archive for projects of all kinds'. I don't think that he ever accomplished much with it though. He could have.

There is a street-level of detail needed to do Venice, California best. He wouldn't go there really. By contrast, there was one Russian historian living in Venice who gave up being a Europeanist and just became a Venice scholar for 25 years. His archive of ephemera was stunning and fully curated. There is also the old Venice City Hall where so much experimental poetry, in pamphlets for all of Los Angeles, was collected, in pamphlets, flyers, books, at a place called Beyond Baroque.

So Venice LA is relatively easy to format into work, a copy frayed at the edges, footprints of lost structures, and so on. But the Venice at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair is a bit trickier. It burned

down a year later, but left an imago for the world. I think the Chicago World's Fair is what leads to Venice California.

Are there any Venices built before the 1890s? Any extra Venices?

JJL: No, I think the type of Venices that we are discussing, those that form some enduring part of the city, they would begin, as far as I know, with Abbot Kinney's creation.

NMK: But modelled, of course, partly on the Chicago World's Fair. They turned Chicago by the lake into a kind Venice Lagoon and more in 1893. They build a boardwalk looking toward Lake Michigan. Forty million people visited the fair; it drew these crowds, like wagon trains, but by train, from across America.

JJL: There seems to have been a strong tradition for that kind of thing in late nineteenth-century America. We had the Great Exhibition of 1852; but in places like Dallas, there was an annual State Fair staged in a dedicated area of the city. I think Fair Park first gets going in the 1880s. Then in 1936 Dallas eventually had the Texas Continental Exhibition. This massive exhibition included the 'Streets of Paris', which were transported from Chicago – they had been part of the Chicago World's Fair – and then were moved to Fair Park. I'm sure they had a Venice as part of the Dallas World's Fair.

NMK: In Coney Island, they built a kind of Venice. At this point, Venice was firmly, as an imago, attached to amusement park culture. The shape for many of these amusement park areas amounted to something like a berm. A bird's eye view effect, but from below somehow, where you go down an indented road, then look up, but never see past the canyon view. You are in the embrace of an enclosed land-based symbol. In Venice, it was symbolic of the great sovereignties of Europe. Berm is the design basis of Disneyland.

JJL: Kinney originally planned his Venice as an educational environment and would organize lectures and scholarly events but nobody would turn up. He had hoped that his Venice would be a place of learning, a way to introduce European culture to the people of Los Angeles. The lure of the beach was much more interesting to most people than the prospect of sitting through dry lectures about European culture, so the whole thing became an amusement park with gondolier rides taking people up and down the Grand Canal.

NMK: Venice was mentally Coney Island by the sea. It had a lascivious, anarchic reputation somehow. It had been part of the Grand Tour in the eighteenth century, the last sensual moment somehow before the tour ended. It was also an enclosed space, a fragile enclave that had once been the mistress of the eastern Mediterranean. To Coney Island, Venice was about hegemony, about America as the master of the sea. But it's guesswork really. Coney island was the sensual cove of the greatest port in America. I guess Venice had that reputation. But the strange part is that Venice

had slipped so badly after its conquest by Napoleon in 1797. Maybe Venice also was a ruin somehow, the decay of cities, a kind of gothic revival Romantic phantom. It was a splendid imago, a mental picture, but precisely of what?

JJL: In *Delirious New York* [1994], Rem Koolhaas describes Coney Island as a laboratory for the Manhattan skyline. This collapsing of spaces of work and spaces of leisure soon becomes representative of a type of delirium where the old distinctions between the real and the imaginary are no longer discernable. We know very well that the ruin is a trigger for the imagination, it is perhaps this freedom to experience the ruins of Coney Island reinstated as towers in the heart of global capital (Manhattan) that somehow connects to the image of Venice that we are searching for?

NMK: Maybe there is something to be done with these imagos that are fictional narratives, what I call 'docufables', something that we can adapt in our *Venice, Venice* project.

Let's propose two tropes or two signifiers. One associated with the Venice Mardi Gras, the carnival Venice, Venice Casanova, it was a place where you could fuck around, the paintings of the Lotus Eater and all that stuff, playful Venice. The other Venice is the 'Queen of the Coast'. All the cities that took Venice on saw it as having a sovereign authority that was associated with the water.

JJL: Yes, this sort of connects with the shift from Venice being a centre of commerce and world trade to later becoming a centre for entertainment and tourism. Rem Koolhaas would have a diagram of that. It would chart the various time zones to show how these contrasting images of Venice impact on our collective imaginary in different ways at different moments in history.

NMK: We should have people enter a layered map of all the different Venices. We could even have it online!

NMK: Can we say that Venice is a place of political sovereignty, a myth associated with being a democratic place for scoundrels and newcomers, a place of very free trade? Venice was the first of what centuries later was called a 'free port'. To keep trade flowing, for all the strangers and outlanders, from North Africa to Romania and Turkey, it wasn't as racist as other cities. Venice had the first ghetto. The Jews weren't taken away, the ghetto survived. Venice has this kind of gild capitalism. It has this double meaning, a place of commodified entertainment, this is a place that you get laid so to speak, somehow this is mixed in with the classy 'Queen of the Coast'. There is also the jewel-like quality that it has. Venice can't get any bigger.

It is important to remember that Kinney was a highly sexualized guy. He had two families. The two houses were pretty much next door to one another so that he could move quite easily between them. LA has a strange connection between being wide open and at the same time incredibly uptight.

Anyway, Venice seems to have a playful meaning that the era of the amusement part embraced. Then, on the other hand, there is this Queen of the Coast quality, a classy Queen of the Coast.

There is also something about how it couldn't get any bigger, Venice is like a jewel rather than a place. Those are the three elements that seem to repeat. We need to test this hypothesis to see if it is right. I'm normally wrong; I'm always wrong.

JJL: But what does this tell us about LA and London as they exist now? In the case of Los Angeles, it seems to point to the regeneration of Venice, what does that say about the city? Venice Beach is currently a site of rapid gentrification. Whereas in London it is just infrastructure, it is just a canal passing through a wealthy residential part of West London that happens to be next to the A40.

NMK: It is symbolic of the loss of hegemony. A post-colonial symbol.

JJL: Yes, it might be useful to use that idea of lost hegemony to understand the connection with the canals. Little Venice can help us to understand the changing status of London; the canals offer some insight into the shift from commerce and trade to spaces of entertainment and tourism. In the 1980s, they tried to sell apartments in the newly built docklands by asserting that 'it looks like Venice but operates like New York'. Venice alone was not going to attract the punters!

NMK: Nineteenth-century Venice was decayed; it was a rotten place. Which Venice do they want, fifteenth-century Venice or nineteenth-century Venice? Did Britain see itself as a new Venice? No? In the late nineteenth century, England saw itself as a new Venice. Like Venice, Britain had a big empire and was a tiny Island.

JJL: In the 1980s, the Canals of London were places you wouldn't go to.

NMK: Did they function at all?

JJL: Maybe a few canal boats. The canals were once key to the infrastructure of the UK, but now they simply function as part of the tourist industry. Little Venice connects the Grand Union Canal and Regents Canal. The Grand Union stretches all the way up to Birmingham; the Regents Canal was later built as an arm to reach across North London (overseen by Nash) and to the Limehouse Basin and then out to the Thames. They were used like the railway system that later replaced them. In the late 1970s, electricity companies sunk massive 400KV cables under the towpaths.

NMK: I find it interesting that after Britain is crushed in the Second World War, when their entire hegemonic meaning in the world is taken away, when they had to give up almost everything – just then, the London bankers turned specks of what remained into tax havens. Is this when the canals are called Venice? No earlier, when the empire is growing, but somehow a way of forming a connection with the memento mori of Venice, the decay. That's one imago, like a clown's face and death. At other times, it is closer to an image of carnival. Or are they both part of the same place, the empire that can't last? Venice as a sovereign place and then Venice as a symptom of the decay of greatness. Like Venice,

Britain remained beautiful and functional, but always afraid; such a small place for so much. It would seem, if I'm hearing it right, the British called it Little Venice while all this is happening.

When do they call it Venice?

JJL: That is a nice theory but I think the naming of Little Venice is much earlier than you propose! We are talking more around Byron's life time; he is apparently the one that first named it Little Venice. Byron died in the 1820s. That is over 100 years before the end of the Second World War.

NMK: I see, maybe in the 1820s, but the name caught on after the 1860s. Is that it? I don't have that basic part of the derivation straight. But as a symbolic order, the historical facts can somehow be muddier, for sure not always a good thing, too easy. We'll dig this out. I think there are three or four Venices, as fictions that are built. Unlike other cities, when you say Paris you don't get confused. Mostly it is a nineteenth-century story; there is not much to say about medieval Paris except for the fact that they threw their garbage out of window.

JJL: Have you seen the Paris in China? It is an incredible thing. A ghost city based on Paris. They use it for pop videos.

NMK: There is a Paris in China! They built one? They built everything else. Yes, why not. There is certainly something important to us about the staging of space in Venice.

Maybe we should go over the four Venices that we have identified. One is the carnival, amusement image. Then there is the 'Queen of the Coast' image. One is the sense of almost hypnagogic, dreamy, symbolic Venice – something that Burne-Jones would have painted. The fourth is the scripted space, the staging around San Marco – it is so sensational. People, for the most part, only know Venice as a place of puzzles in the water, a place they visit because so few people live there. I'm sure very few people actually came from Venice.

Then we have that funny movie with Katherine Hepburn. In the film, she falls into the canal. She damaged her eyes for the rest of her life from doing that!

JJL: *Summertime* is a great film. All shot over a day in Venice. It starts with Hepburn approaching Venice on the train just as it crosses the lagoon. I found the place where she fell in the canal next to the shop that features the red Venetian glass in the window. The shop is still there! Everything is quite different in the shop, but they were selling postcards with images taken from film stills of *Summertime* showing Hepburn holding the red Venetian glass. I guess you could say that this is where Los Angeles has impacted on Venice.

NMK: Yes, I know the scene. It is where the boyfriend played by Rossano Brazzi goes after her, throws her off balance after they look at the blown glass. That movie might not be proof of what Americans thought that Venice was, but it is somehow symbolic of that, a tender fifties sneak peek.



Figure 3: David Lean, *Summertime*, United States, 1955.

JJL: I have always been interested in the way the American artist is represented in that movie. It is important to remember that *Summertime* is made by the British film director, David Lean. I guess he had some idea of what it means to be an American abroad! Here we have an image of Americans in Venice through the eyes of an English man! Los Angeles, London and Venice all mixed into one movie. At one point the artist takes his girlfriend off to see the Biennale.

NMK: What is particularly important is that Venice is an artisanal city. It had this strong arts and craft meaning.

JJL: Yes, Ruskin and St Georges Church. Ruskin treating Venice as one giant sculpture.

NMK: Somehow this attachment is a sort of memento mori, yet another. The symbolist meaning is a way to say that the arts and crafts movement lives on; and milky glass and all the rest of it. But then Venice is one of the greatest movie sets you can imagine, because of the way the space works. It is very clear that it is this quality that attracted Abbot Kinney.

JJL: I think we can say that Venice is a giant stage for a cultural production.

NMK: On Venice Beach, the most important thing is the Venice boardwalk. It is the least Venice part of Venice Beach, it doesn't look anything like Venice.

JJL: The street names and bridges tell us most about LA's continuing desire to own a piece of Venice. These remaining artefacts are somehow more incongruous than the Venetian style buildings and arcades that you get on the beach front. This might be the thing that connects most closely to Little Venice.

NMK: Are these images that we keep returning to just popping out of our heads, or do they already exist as established signifiers or tropes, as bulletins that we can connect to Venice Beach and Little Venice? Like the fragility near the water.

JJL: What about Venice as a changing image? I think we can talk about how Venice appears very differently in visual representations over time. This is perhaps why it would be good to start with a series of four images. We have discussed how Venice meets the water, and we know that the staging of San Marco is important (but not essential) to any replica of Venice. Then there is Carnival Venice and finally Venice as sovereign authority. If we could find a version of Venice that matches these contrasting images, then we would understand why these spatial representations have endured.

NMK: We need simple tropes that we can return to. We are looking for certain imagos to see if they match. Which part of Venice did they want to remember physically? How does it code in?

JJL: I think that what we have connects to an idea of a new urbanism. It could be argued that we are developing a method for assessing the current health of the city.

NMK: Venice is like a mind-boggling little town with a bad cough. For example, the first article written about Echo Park was in the 1970s, and it was called 'a landlocked Venice'. I knew the guy who wrote it and what he was thinking. He was interested in the small locked-in look of Echo Park and how this reflected the small locked-in look of Venice.

JJL: For Ruskin, Venice was a locked-in piece of sculpture. He would get on a ladder and copy architectural details in his notebook. It was as if he was extremely anxious about Venice disappearing, it was as if he was trying to keep some memory of it in his notebooks. It is strange to think of this odd relation between being overly visible but at the same time disappearing. We are told that Venice is always on the point of being submerged.

NMK: Typical of Ruskin, there are no human beings; it is as if nobody lives there apart from him.

JJL: How did Venice affect Byron? He famously swims up the Grand Canal. Was the water cleaner then? I doubt it. I'll tell you what, let's imagine for a moment what it would have been like to be Ruskin in Venice.

NMK: I would rather not be Ruskin, I would like to be Millais, let's say with more talents to spare, more than just enthusiasm for Ruskin's wife. Still, Millais led a charmed life, and Ruskin, besides not being able to swim, certainly did not.

I heard this story about Byron. Some British tourists are going through Italy and suddenly someone said, 'is that who I think it is?' Then the tourist guide says, 'avert your eyes'. Simply to look at him would be an assault on your sexuality. He was the sexiest man alive.

JJL: Amazing, I don't think I have heard that story before. You must tell me the story that you have about Millais.

Now that we have our four categories to test out we should make our way over to West London.

Little Venice, London
14 October 2016



Figure 4: Little Venice, The Lagoon, 2016.

NMK: We can immediately see that the relative uselessness of the post-industrial ruins has mutated into the contemplative lagoon. What were these canals used for? What was their purpose?

JJL: The canals allowed the Industrial Revolution to happen. They fueled the growth of the economy.

NMK: What sort of thing would have come through on the canals?

JJL: You would have seen large canal boats with the fuel and goods needed to run the factories, lots of coal. This was the transport infrastructure that allowed the country to function.

NMK: In the 1860s? right? Would it have got very peaceful and quiet on the canals?

JJL: I guess so, there was a point when there was simply no need for them. They become redundant, smelly post-industrial left overs. Like the Venice Beach LA canals of the 1930s.

I can't say precisely when it happens, but clearly at some point the canals become attractive for property development. Everyone wants to live in a house next to a canal. Just like the gentrification going on in Venice Beach LA in the 1990s.

It is important to remember that the Regent's Canal and the Grand Union Canal pass through different areas of London. Maida Vale is the expensive bit. Just look at these large Regency white-fronted stucco Nash houses, they would have been family houses maybe for friends and relatives of the Royal family. Many of these houses have since been turned into flats, but this area remains a wealthy part of London. People like Richard Branson and Noel Gallagher live here now.

NMK: Maybe part of the image of Venice has to do with an aristocratic experience image of Venice.

JJL: Yes, what is Byron doing here? There is an argument that Byron called this canal intersection *Little Venice*, not Robert Browning.

NMK: When you say canal, how many places do you think of? There are incredible canals in Mexico City, they go on for miles.

JJL: If you look at this canal boat passing us now. Just imagine, you could go all the way to Scotland on that.

NMK: We need to know what Venice was like in the 1850s/60s. What did the actual (Italian) Venice look like? What did the people that went there see? Obviously the image of Venice came from Venice, but the British invented this imaginary place. What state was Venice in at this time? The Italian Nation State was being built, how did Venice fit? This was mostly in the north, right? What is missing in our puzzle is that we don't know what we would see if we visited Venice of the 1860s.

JJL: I think that visitors to Venice saw a kind of opportunity for self-discovery, for culture and a space for freedom.

NMK: Yes, a cultural, mental artefact where you could be lost in your own creative poetic space.

JJL: Look, we are no longer in Little Venice. We have walked into the Battleship building alongside the A40 flyover. From here, we can look back and see how this little lagoon like area of the canal is somehow functional, a place where narrow boats can turn around.

NMK: If we want to play the game of what Venice was like in the 1860s, we have to think about what they saw. I am really interested to know why it took so long for the name 'Little Venice' to stick. Almost 100 years for the name to stick. It was not officially named Little Venice until after the Second World War.

JJL: I think we can agree that Little Venice has a very light relation to the images of Venice we discussed earlier; the carnival Venice and the sovereign city-state Queen of the Coast Venice. The relation with Venice is certainly present, but it is caught up in the misty contemplative mode. I feel that this lighter relation produces something that we still need to fully understand.

NMK: Little Venice is almost accidental. It is more like a lagoon.

JJL: This is where Regent's Canal connects the Grand Union via Paddington Basin. You can buy a coffee here on a canal boat. Look, that sign says Rembrandt Gardens.

NMK: What does that mean? This place is certainly full of what seem like fairly random cultural references!

We need an angle. Let's consider the lagoon area of *Little Venice*, we might think of it as a blink inside an industrial space. That is what they did in Chicago in 1893; they made a contemplative lagoon area. Perhaps the picturesque lagoon, like shape of the canal was positioned here as a way to keep the wealthy people from getting annoyed. Something like a park situated to block an industrial space.

JJL: We stand here looking at what was the heart of global trade but somehow masked with a contemplative image. The image of Venice is faint, the metal work on the bridges surrounding the lagoon has been painted light blue; there is also some decorative lattice work. This, I suppose, is some kind of nod to Venice. The ornamental ends of the iron work are painted gold. Should we call this a kind of 'Venicing'? The decorative and playful paintwork certainly takes the emphasis off the moody (but quaint) industrial look of the bridges further down the canal.

NMK: A contemplative spot in a more industrial space, inside an active city. Each building was home to people rich enough to have you buried in cement. It seems that the wealthy Maida Vale families did not resist this canal. They all went ahead and didn't resist the development outside of their front doors.



Figure 5: Little Venice, 2016.

NMK: I would say that this is a contemplative spot within a busy trading city. The LA version makes sense, the Chicago version makes sense and the St Louis version makes sense. These Venices had to be attached to the idea of an energized city, but a contemplative piece of it. The theory is that Venice was old and contemplative when the world was changing into something new.

JJL: Maybe there was a feeling that it was vulgar to overstate the relation to Venice. Unlike LA, where they perhaps don't worry about theatricality.

NMK: Abbot Kinney, who founded Venice, didn't care much for theatricality. Ironic. He lived a quiet, bohemian rich man's life, with two wives salted away separately, each within easy walking distance on a peaceful afternoon.

JJL: Yes, but were these streets Italian or American? Most of all, they were an investment. He is not deeply interested in progressing culture. He seems like someone interested in sharing what he had seen on his tour of Europe. Is that giving him too much credit?

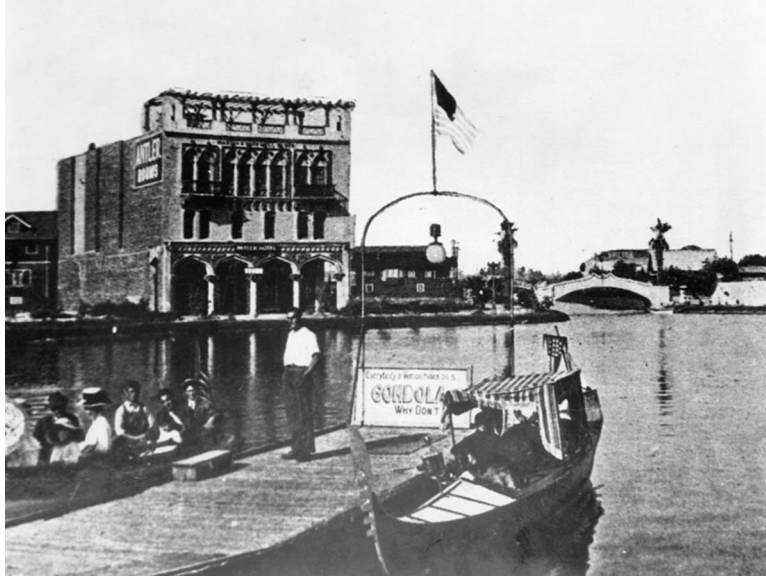


Figure 6: *View of the Lagoon, Venice, Los Angeles, 1905.*

NMK: He was connected to LA by infrastructure. Venice Beach was an area only reached by one tram. The city wanted to develop it, and they didn't have a Port so they needed an image. Kinney decided the coastline was not properly marketed. That was all part of it.

JJL: Is there any angle where you could say that any of this could actually look like Venice? Is there any particular angle or vista where we can stand and look at the canal, and say we recognize some aspect of the famous city? My feeling standing here is that there is not much of a resemblance. The connection to Venice seems to reside in name only.

NMK: (Looking at the signage) I am curious about what they are doing in 1900, giving this frilly thing to this canal – by 1900 the canal system was no longer useful, right?

JJL: Maybe what happened is that some local planners were aware that there were a few famous writers here – Byron is here, Robert Browning is here. They hear that there is this name for the

canal intersection in West London and say to themselves 'I know, why don't we make it a bit more like Venice? Let's do a bit of placemaking!' They found the image to fit the site.

NMK: 1900 is the year. 1900, Venice LA, 1893, Venice Chicago, 1904 Venice, St Louis. Maybe we are narrowing it down to one decade. Around 1900 Venice takes on a strange meaning in relation to industrialization. People don't realize that the Industrial Revolution didn't happen like a change in the seasons. It would go forward and backward for a century in its fantasies of itself. But then came a sense of takeoff, as a new century appears. Everything seems to happen about 1900.

JJL: 1900 is the meeting point, a catharsis. Venice is the image that connects the past to the future.

NMK: This is an era that I know well. This bridge was added in 1900. Look the plaque says: 'Jubilee Greenway'. 1900 was the year of the Jubilee. This was in honour of an ageing Queen. She only has a few minutes left, and it became a very big thing. At that point they dubbed this part of London *Little Venice* – in honour of literature, in honour of the contemplative idea of the sovereignty that Venice had once enjoyed.

Often amusement areas are about to decay. Main Street Disney was built just when the main streets across America were about to die. Ten years later, Disney Inc. has to redesign the whole thing. Now main streets look too shitty. The suburban facts have killed off many inner cities.

JJL: Like the development of Las Vegas. The movement from Freemont Street to the Strip – and then back again. Do you remember that time when we went to visit Jon Jerde in his office on Venice Beach?

NMK: Almost a contemplation of the era of Jerde ending. He was already ill. A singular date, like Jerde's 1990s – stands in for so many conflicting things. High consumerism meets globalization. Look at 1900. What did 1900 represent to the world beside the coming of electricity? The sense of foreboding was almost as strong as the feeling of emergent power. All these conflicting impulses were somehow connected to this. Little Venice was the feeling of the empire reaching its apex – a forward/backward look.

JJL: Yes, but more backward than forward.

NMK: They restored the bridges surrounding the lagoon in 1900 when the canals were no longer relevant. Here we have are faced with a strange sense of discovery and decay, Venice as an industrial memento mori.

We now have movies, *Iron Man* and *Blade Runner* serve this role for us now. In America, we dream of a post-neo-retro 1940s. Even the picturesque is noir, like a gloomy toy house.

JJL: Sorry to interrupt but look at that swan.

NMK: A fat meal for five. He looks restless for a swan. Has he lost his mate for life? Did she leave him flat?

JJL: I think he sees you as a meal for one!

Look, here we have the misty quality we discussed. Take a look down that tunnel.

NMK: In 1900, it was quiet, that's when it gets its meaning. A contradictory meaning: old use/new use. Contemplative, and miniaturized, stuck like a lapel pin right inside an industrial city. Thanks to realtors, it even has some way of maintaining its cockeyed vitality. An eternally wrinkled, ageing maiden aunt, always ready for another plastic surgery. I think that's what Abbot Kinney had in mind, strangely enough. The ruins of the ultimate city state, as a symbol of progress inside a brand new Los Angeles. Venice was to be his beach-town suburb, the subjunctive Venice about to happen. So he thought that's what he was building – a suburb about ruins with great plumbing. And then his Venice Beach development flopped. So it changed, as if by a will of its own, into an amusement park. Kinney was even planning to go Italian straight down the entire LA coast. He had plans for an LA/Naples.

JJL: I didn't realize that! There was no stopping him. Was he going to have a different family in each of the coastal cities of Italy?

NMK: It's cute, thinking of him strolling in his summer coat from one family to another. I like Abbot Kinney.

JJL: Yes, I like him too.

NMK: He would have been charming company over lunch.

JJL: He was a philanthropist; he had made all of his money from cigarettes and seems to have wanted to give something back.

NMK: With the conflicted re-creation of Venice (not just for recreation), we have identified the key quality: an industrial memento mori, a contemplative sense of death – it's as if death is immanent in how a city feels, like old lace; even when the world is industrially expanding, a pleasant foreboding. I think Kinney was going after that.

JJL: We also identified two other key tropes. One is associated with the Venice Mardi Gras, the carnival Venice. The other Venice is the Queen of the Coast. Venice has an enduring sovereign authority that was associated with the water. This dual identity of carnival and sovereign city-state



Figure 7: Venice walk.

is something that we can identify with both London and Los Angeles – although I would argue that Venice LA is more connected to the former than the latter.

When we walked around Venice Beach in 2007, the place had a misty quality.

NMK: The mist is peculiar to LA, rather like the mist along the eastern Mediterranean coasts or even near the Dead Sea. It is a very pale fog. Eventually, that fog became the basis of inland smog – another ironic nod to industrial London, where the term was invented. But this is a mist suggesting a spring rain. So too perhaps in Little Venice, in every Venice. Even like the English greenbelt cities around 1900, compared to the City Beautiful designs in America at the same time. Harmonious disharmony. As if to celebrate how little time of our own we are really allowed to have. Life in the city is grandiose, alienating, but also experienced in miniature.

JJL: I think this contemplative mode in the heart of the constantly transforming city is what we have come to. This appears to be the lasting image that Venice had for those that sort to recreate it.

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